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TAGS: [SO](#)[CI](#) [PG](#)[OV](#) [KCR](#)[M](#) [EA](#)[ID](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: St. Kitts Shooting for Number One

CLASSIFIED BY: D. Brent Hardt, Charge d'Affaires, a.i., DOS; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary. The per capita murder rate in St. Kitts is on pace to be among the highest in the world for the second year in a row. The country has set a new record for gun murders, despite new gun legislation and a national crackdown on illegal fire arms. A poorly trained police force sorely in need of community police training has hamstrung the government's efforts to combat the problem, which feeds off of a high unemployment rate and problems in the educational system. Community Policing programs under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, alongside at-risk youth programs and firearms tracing, would be timely initiatives to help the struggling Kittitian authorities address the chronic crime problem with their own limited resources. End summary.

Murder Capital of the World?

12. (C) The murder rate in St. Kitts is already ahead of 2008's record setting 22 murders, hitting 26 murders in November - of which 22 remain unsolved. The murder rate per 1000 people in St. Kitts is 0.6, putting the twin-island nation just behind Columbia's 0.61 per 1000 for the dubious honor of "murder capital of the world". Since 2003, the murder rate in the country has increased by almost three fold, which has average Kittitians afraid to go outside at night in some parts of the island, according to Attorney General Dennis Merchant.

Gun Battles in the Streets

13. (C) The core problem is not really one of organized crime, rather one of disorganized crime and a youth culture that glorifies guns and violence, Merchant explained to poloff in a recent meeting. "We have a problem with small youth gangs and there are battles over turf, but we are not facing an organized crime problem," he claimed. Conflicts that in the past would have been settled with a fist fight or at most a knife, are now settled by gunfire, he added. According to opposition party Leader Lindsay Grant, the day before St. Kitts' National Day there was a running gun battle with automatic weapons in the middle of the afternoon

just blocks from the Prime Minister's office. AG Merchant expressed concern that St. Kitts was on the verge of losing an entire generation of youth to crime and violence. He said the government is cognizant of the danger posed to Kittitian society if this rise in youth crime continues unchecked. Youth unemployment in poorer neighborhoods is running close to sixty percent, but may be even higher, he suggested. Unless the government can keep young men in school and find meaningful employment opportunities for them, there will never be a long-term solution to the problem, he lamented.

Access to Guns at Root of Problems

14. (C) While youth run amok and the local drug trade are the sources for the current crime wave, it is the commensurate deluge of illegal guns coming into the country that has the situation spinning out of control, according the AG. "Our intelligence shows that most of the gun trade is not linked to the drug trade and is largely a discreet activity," he said. According to Merchant, the primary source of illegal guns is the United States via traditional smuggling, and increasingly through legitimate mail and import services. The government recently passed legislation increasing

the penalties for fire arms, but police have yet to see a real change in the gun problem. "We need a way to find and identify guns in houses where we know they are being hidden," he explained. "When the neighbors report that a person in a specific house fired a gun we need to be able to find that gun, which has proven very difficult to date."

Community Policing Help Requested

15. (C) The real problem from a law enforcement perspective, AG Merchant explained, is a poorly trained and unmotivated police force. The police have a tendency to stay in their stations or police cars and never seem to get out and walk the streets anymore. "I can go days without seeing a police officer walking the streets of downtown Basseterre" he said. He believed that community policing training that would help Kittian law enforcement to restructure patrols and train officers how to interact with the community would help enhance the police forces' effectiveness.

Comment

16. (C) Rising crime is the major political issue in St. Kitts as it heads into elections due early in the New Year. Many people fear that the country has passed the point of no return, where violence is simply a part of the social fabric that will never go away. To date, the issue of violent crime has not spilled over to the tourism sector, but as tourism numbers increase and the visibility of the country's stratospheric murder rate becomes better known, it is certain to affect high-profile tourism infrastructure projects. USAID is working with local NGOs to address youth violence through its employment and empowerment

programs on the island. This year USAID programs provided life skills training to 225 youth in St. Kitts and Nevis. Under CBSI, USAID hopes to support youth-focused programs in remedial education, second chance education and youth workforce development programs, targeting one of the root causes of the crime problem in the region - youth employment. This support could not come a moment too soon for St. Kitts.

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